

It's the Journey that Counts

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After working hard, studying long hours and investing the time, I am proud to have earned the professional Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation. So, now what? What does this mean for me? What did I hope to gain as a result? Prestige? Career advancement?

I probably should have asked myself those questions before beginning the journey. But it seemed like such a distant dream when I first decided to pursue the certification so many years ago. At the time, my goal was simple - I wanted to earn my CAE. I thought by placing those initials after my name that my life might magically change. However, now that I look back, I see that the real benefits did not come from reaching my goal. It was the journey itself that has proven to be so invaluable.

So what made the journey so meaningful?

Despite the fact that I had recently earned a master's degree, I was not particularly confident in applying my educational background in the workplace. Yes, I learned a lot about management, organizational structure, financial methods, human resources, governance and marketing. And yet, with all this knowledge I had gained, I was never quite sure how it was relevant to my profession. I was not sure how to apply it in my daily life in a non-profit membership association.

What I didn't realize was that I needed some way to apply what I learned through the formal education process more specifically to my profession – association management. I didn't realize that going through the process of earning the designation in my field would provide the guidance in applying my knowledge in an association environment.

That's what the CAE offered me. The value of the designation is so much more than those initials following my name. It's the ability to apply the knowledge I gained to my work at a non-profit association. Go figure!



Through the process of spending all those hours of reading and discussing association topics, I was able to gain the right tools for excelling in my unique working environment. What I learned along my own professional development career path is what's given me the confidence to become better at what I do. Now, when I am asked how something can be applied to an association, I can respond with confidence.

Along with an extensive body of knowledge, I have also acquired an essential networking connection with other association executives that have earned the CAE. If I need advice or just someone to discuss my current challenges with, I have an entire network at my disposal. The CAE tied it all together for me. I imagine that earning the SR/WA or a right of way certification must result in similar benefits. IRWA is the only source for a complete body of knowledge for the right of way profession and its multi-disciplined professionals.

So, as you follow your own professional development career path, don't forget to ask yourself these questions: What will your designation or certification mean to you? What do you hope to gain as a result of your pursuit?

However, don't be surprised to discover that, once you reach your final destination, the real value comes from what you gained along the way.